

# The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club

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1957-1958

# TRAIL & LANDSCAPE

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## The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club

— Founded 1879 —

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**Objectives of the Club:** To promote the appreciation, preservation and conservation of Canada's natural heritage; to encourage investigation and publish the results of research in all fields of natural history and to diffuse the information on these fields as widely as possible; to support and co-operate with organizations engaged in preserving, maintaining or restoring environments of high quality for living things.

**Club Publications:** THE CANADIAN FIELD-NATURALIST, a quarterly devoted to reporting research in all fields of natural history relevant to Canada, and TRAIL & LANDSCAPE, a quarterly providing articles on the natural history of the Ottawa Valley and on Club activities.

**Field Trips, Lectures** and other natural history activities are arranged for local members; see "Coming Events" in this issue.

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# Welcome New Members

## Ottawa Area

Bob. M. Boisvert & Family  
Victoria-Marie Cusson  
Ellen Derry / Ron Woods  
Lorraine C. Devanthey  
Chanel Fournier  
Marie-José Gandier  
Claire Haas & Family  
Tom L. Hebbert  
Eric D. Jones & Family

Krystal S. Koktan  
Nicole Lauro / Andrew Barton  
Martha Patterson / Pat. Mclean  
Phillip B. Prodger  
Mona H. Richardson  
Geoff T. Rowe  
Michelle Tarabay  
Alette J. Willis & Family

## Gatineau Area

Muriel A. How

## Other Areas

David A. Flegel (British Columbia)  
Radu G. Guiasu (Ontario)

Henry Steger  
Chair, Membership Committee  
September 2007

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# Conservation Matters

*Christine Hanrahan*

When the Conservation Committee was first initiated back in the 1970s, it attracted a lot of knowledgeable people, experienced in issues that matter to the naturalist community. They were an energetic and enthusiastic bunch, who, as a group, undertook site visits to areas of concern, attended multiple meetings, prepared and delivered many papers, and did all the myriad of things that a busy committee must do to meet the challenges of trying to protect habitats and wildlife. Those were the halcyon days of the committee. In latter years, the group has been small and we struggle to deal with the issues that come our way. Regrettably, we have to let many pass by. The present committee is clearly a dedicated and knowledgeable one, and I would like to make special mention of Stan Rosenbaum, who has chaired this committee for years, attends meetings, prepares letters and briefs, and keeps the rest of us committed. But all the current members deserve kudos for carrying on with the necessary task of trying to protect natural areas. While there are many other conservation groups, few have the expertise in flora and fauna that the OFNC can bring to the issues. If you would like to help out, please join us and see what we are all about. We meet the first Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at the Fletcher Wildlife Garden. More details about the committee can be found at <http://www.ofnc.ca/conservation>.

## **City & NCC Mosquito Larvicide Program**

Concern was raised over the City's plans to use larvicides to control mosquitoes in roadside catch basins and surface waters. Initially, the City's website ([http://ottawa.ca/residents/health/conditions/westnile/updates/2007/index\\_en.html](http://ottawa.ca/residents/health/conditions/westnile/updates/2007/index_en.html)) stated "The application of larvicides to roadside catch basins and surface waters has not started due to the absence of the species of mosquitoes known to transmit the West Nile virus."

However, by early July, it was apparent that they had decided to do so. Their website, for the week of July 6, 2007, notes: "*The application of larvicides to roadside catch basins and surface waters has started and will continue throughout the summer.*"

It appears that a change of policy took effect during the first week of July. Despite a total lack of evidence of West Nile Virus, the City began applying pesticide to

surface waters, not just catch basins (i.e. drains). The City undertakes testing of "mosquito pools," and it seems that the number of pools tested increased from 204 in late June to 476 by early August.

The Conservation Committee believes that correlation between larvicide application and the state of local wildlife populations, should be considered. While the larvicide used (Bti) is considered safe for humans, as one committee member said, humans are not the ones drinking the treated water. This is an issue that the committee will follow up on in preparation for the 2008 mosquito season.

### **Leitrim Ottawa Municipal Board (OMB) Appeal Update**

The long battle to preserve what is left of the Leitrim Wetlands, continues. Earlier, the Greenspace Alliance and the Sierra Club retained the services of Linda McAffrey of the University of Ottawa Environmental Law Clinic. The following report is based on information from several committee members, prepared by Stan.

The appeal by Greenspace Alliance and Sierra Club was dismissed in May at the preliminary hearing stage. The reasons given by OMB (member Denhez) include: "... the appeals do not disclose land use planning on the grounds that they could succeed. First, the boundaries of the protected PSW, defined by the Province, did not correspond to appellants' assumptions ... the Province made a conscious trade-off—which (whether one agrees or disagrees) was within its jurisdiction to make. Next, the other environmental grounds have already been disposed of, in the six environmental assessments and 29 approvals of other statutory bodies, including senior governments. The Board disagrees with appellants' premise, that the Board necessarily provides an alternate forum for parties dissatisfied with environmental decisions, to revisit those issues before the Board ..."

Linda writes: "Gloucester, and later Ottawa, accepted the developer's boundary and made planning decisions based on that boundary even though there is no evidence that the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) ever revised the boundary based on a new evaluation ... (therefore) it was important to develop evidence in relation to adverse environmental impact. It would not be prudent to rely solely on the prohibition against development in or adjacent to wetlands." Linda demanded release of the developer's data, which turned out to be a 5-inch stack. She informed the Board that it would take more than the statutory 10 days to examine the data. The Member disallowed this, and accepted the developer's motion to dismiss.

Linda describes a two-stage option to appeal further. Step one would be an appeal to the Chair of the OMB, for which the filing fee is \$125. The appellants have already decided to do this. The second step (if the Chair dismisses the appeal) is a judicial review before the provincial Court, "a specialized administrative law Court which is

fully familiar with the fairness and jurisdictional issues arising from the Denhez decisions.” The filing fee is \$181. “The exposure to a costs order is real. Although we would not recommend judicial review if we were not concerned that the case is persuasive, success can never be guaranteed. There is some risk of a costs order in the case of a loss.”

Linda’s case appears to hinge on a technicality—lack of evidence that MNR ever documented an approval of the revised wetland boundary proposed by the developer and accepted by Gloucester and Ottawa. Local MNR staff were not happy with the political interference so it is not a surprise if they never completed the documentation, but OMB again supported the landowner.

Stay tuned for further details on this long and sad saga of a development decision that should never have been made in the first place.

### **Larose Forest**

The OFNC and the Prescott-Russell Stewardship Council organized the second Larose Forest Bio-blitz, held on June 8-9, 2007. Thirty-six experts and other knowledgeable people attended and, once again, a substantial amount of data was added to the inventories for the forest. Equally important, it was an opportunity for those unfamiliar with the area to get to know the forest better. Generous support for the initiative came from the United Counties of Prescott-Russell. A full report will be posted later. For the 2006 Larose Forest Bio-blitz report, and for more information on Larose Forest see: [www.ofnc.ca/conservation/larose/laroseforest.html](http://www.ofnc.ca/conservation/larose/laroseforest.html).

**Acknowledgments:** The report was based primarily on Stan’s monthly Conservation Committee summaries.

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# Report on the 2007 Ottawa Regional Science Fair

*Kathy Conlan*

Jeff Skevington and I were invited to judge the science projects submitted for the OFNC award for the 46<sup>th</sup> Ottawa Regional Science Fair, held at Carleton University on March 31, 2007. The following table shows the number of projects at the fair, classified by project type and age group.

Project subject	Junior	Intermediate	Senior
<b>Life sciences</b>	19		
<b>Biotechnology</b>	10	6*	9**
<b>Earth and environmental science</b>	33	7	
<b>Physical and mathematical sciences</b>	34	6	11***
<b>Engineering and computing sciences</b>	31	9	
<b>Health sciences</b>	48		
<b>Total</b>	175	28	20

\* combined with health sciences

\*\* combined with health, earth and environmental and life sciences

\*\*\* combined with engineering and computing sciences

We found that many of the projects that requested evaluation for the OFNC award were concerned with environmental impacts. None concerned pure natural history. Like last year, we did not constrain ourselves to those who submitted their projects for consideration as there were a number of additional projects that we felt might be relevant. Criteria for evaluation were understanding, imagination, execution, presentation and display. Jeff and I evaluated about 15 projects through the day, which was about five fewer than last year. The OFNC award is \$50 and a one year membership. We enjoyed seeing the enthusiasm of the students and the diversity of topics and had some difficulty reducing our choices to three. On behalf of OFNC, we selected the following for awards.

Robyn Vezina, Immaculata High School, Junior Category. "Are using frozen booms to clean up oil spills the answer?" Robyn was seeking a way to clean up oil spills in a less harmful way than using chemical dispersants. She made a home-style oil out



of vegetable oil and cocoa and measured the speed at which a marble would sink through the oil at room temperature vs at cold temperature. She reasoned that a frozen boom would coagulate oil captured from an oil spill and make it easier to capture physically rather than by burning it off. Robyn also did a lot of research on the effects of past oil spills on marine life.



Victoria-Marie Cusson and Chanel Fournier, Collège Catholique Samuel-Genest, Junior Category. "La réduction écologique des déchets ménagers".

Victoria-Marie and Chanel developed their own house-hold composter out of nested buckets aerated with a computer fan. They then tested the effects of

blood meal, sheep manure, old beer and a combination of all three vs none of these accelerators on the growth of lettuce and radish seeds grown in a mix of their compost and soil. They standardized their mix by calculating the C:N ratio of their food scraps and measuring equal volumes of each. They found that sheep manure was the best accelerator for compost decomposition and this mix also produced the best seed growth.



Marie-Josée Gandier and Michelle Tarabay, Collège Catholique Samuel-Genest,

Intermediate Category. "La dégradation et la durabilité des bioplastiques". Marie-Josée and Michelle manufactured several kinds of biodegradable plastics out of various household ingredients and tested their effects on adult *Coleus* growth and seed germination. They found that their biodegradable plastics did a better job than non-biodegradable plastics in supporting and encouraging the growth of both the adult plants and seeds.



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## News from the FWG: Summer 2007

*Christine Hanrahan*

August is reaching its mid-point as I write this, and the season is fast racing by. Summer is traditionally the busiest time of year at the garden but is so brief that doing all that we want to, can be a challenge. Nonetheless, we've managed to accomplish quite a lot, as you will see.

### **Backyard Garden News**

Regular visitors to the garden will note two important changes to the BYG. Although initially we thought the BYG pond would have to wait for complete rehabilitation, this has, in fact, been accomplished. The wonderful results are thanks to the ingenuity and hard work of a group of volunteers capably led by Tony Denton. Even the long-defunct upper pond is now working, complete with a constant, gentle trickle of water into the pond below, serving as a magnet for critters of all sorts. Not long after the pond was completed four Green Frogs moved in, almost as if they'd

been waiting!

The other major project involves the Woodland Walk section of the BYG, one of the garden's most enchanting features. Over time, several species of plants had begun to dominate (yes, even native species can be thugs in the garden) and other species were lost. Betty Campbell, a long-time volunteer who'd retired from the garden a little while ago, has come back to lead this work with the assistance of Brian Turnbull, our summer employee. They have added lots of logs and moss, and it is looking promising.

A multitude of tasks are undertaken to keep the garden in such excellent condition. If you enjoy gardening and nature, why not consider donating a few hours per week to the BYG? Volunteers meet Friday mornings from spring through early fall. Contact the FWG at either 613-234-6767 or [fletcher@ofnc.ca](mailto:fletcher@ofnc.ca).



### **Signs and Other Structures**

Signs identifying the major habitats in the garden, such as the Hedgerow, New Woods, etc. have now been installed. The next step is to place signs explaining each habitat. As always, Charlie Clifford is the man behind this work. In early June, a very enthusiastic group of volunteers from PriceWaterhouse Coopers green team

spent the day at FWG helping out, including assisting Charlie in the installation of the habitat signs. From what I heard, the digging was very tough. Good thing then, that the volunteers were all young!

Perhaps you have noticed the Gazebo that now adorns the front of the Interpretive Centre. We are very proud of it! It is something we have wanted for a long time and thanks to the generosity of the late Eileen Evans' family, we have it. A ceremony to remember Eileen and to dedicate the Gazebo, will be held in the fall. I'm sure Eileen would have been delighted by this beautifully built structure. [Details on the ceremony elsewhere in T&L.]

### **Events, Tours, Walks**

***Native Plant Sale:*** Inclement weather put only a slight damper on the sale, and we raised a good amount of money to enable us to carry out the various projects, such as the above mentioned, BYG pond. Many thanks to all the volunteers who organized the event, grew the plants for sale, and staffed the event during the day itself.

***Dedication of the Dale Crook Bench:*** In late June we held a ceremony to dedicate the new BYG bench, created in memory of Dale Crook. Dale's family and friends including, of course, those from FWG, turned out on a perfect summer evening for the event. Several people spoke about Dale and his influence on the FWG. His wife, Pat Crook, was presented with a miniature version of the bench complete with plaque, to take home.

***Talks and Walks*** Several OFNC walks were held at FWG and one more is scheduled for September. As well, we've had requests for other walks and several groups have had guided tours of the garden. The FWG also gets several requests each year for someone to talk about gardening for wildlife or gardening with native plants. Sandy Garland usually fulfills these, and by all accounts people greatly enjoy her talks. In one case, her talk was followed by an interview about wildlife gardening for a New York State public radio show!

### **Field Camps**

Geography students from Carleton University held their summer field camp at FWG. The students made good use of the resources at the Interpretive Centre and spoke at length with some of the volunteers. Their reports are now filed at FWG. One of the most interesting aspects of their work was the interviews with visitors, during which they asked a set of questions to determine such things as why they visit the garden, how often they come, how they found out about it, and so on. Although some of the responses were expected (walking dogs is popular), we were really pleased to hear that many of the visitors had changed their gardening habits as a result of visiting the FWG. They were now more interested in native plants and creating wildlife-friendly

gardens than previously. Amusingly, one participant in the exercise said he came to the garden to meet female gardeners! One can only wonder . . .

The other Carleton University summer camp, the one with the little folk, was also back this year. Once a week during the summer Brian led them on a morning walk to introduce them to nature.

### **Summer Employee**

Brian Turnbull, our summer employee, was a delight to work with and we were sorry when his position ended. Not only did he do everything we asked him to, but he wasn't afraid to make suggestions, take the lead on various projects, and provide help for a variety of tasks. One of our ongoing issues is the Amphibian Pond. For several years we've been trying to get a handle on the health (or not) of this pond, but without much success. This year, thanks to Brian, we really moved ahead in our understanding of the pond. He amassed a huge amount of information, both from research online and from searching out and then contacting, knowledgeable people. Using what he learned, he was able to provide us with valuable suggestions and practical solutions to aid our pursuit of pond health. Brian also proved to be a great nature photographer, with some enviable shots of butterflies and other creatures. You can see examples of his work on the FWG blog <http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/newsletter/Blog/index.php> and around the Centre.

Brian is studying Environmental Science at Carleton University (entering his fourth year), where he is on the Dean's Honour List. He said that he chose this field, after trying out another un-related area, because he was concerned about the impact of humans on the environment and wanted to do something to help mitigate the problem. Working at FWG has opened his eyes to how complicated eco-systems can be, and of course, he is referring in particular to the pond (about which he became almost an expert). I asked him what he especially liked about working at FWG. He said two things in particular came to mind—the quantum leap in his knowledge about wildlife, and learning about ponds and wetlands and their intricately balanced systems.

### **Habitats**

Diane Lepage continues with work on the Butterfly Meadow, assisted by a varying number of volunteers. It is looking pretty good now, and although by the time you read this, fall will be here, keep it in mind for a summer visit next year.

### **Problems**

After a quiet spring, with no fires or vandalism, we were surprised to find a huge fire by the Ash Woods in mid-summer. This spot, behind the bird feeder, was a popular location for fires last year. However, this one was not only the biggest, but this

group of thugs removed our bird feeder and burned it. Adding insult to injury, it seems they also burned the small ladder Dale Crook made to enable us to reach the feeder when filling it.

## **Plants and Animals**

### ***Birds***

Two new species were added to the FWG bird list recently. A Solitary Sandpiper was found in the pond by Diane Lepage in May, and in July a most surprising visitor arrived: a Virginia Rail. We don't know how long it had been around, but several people reported seeing a "heron-like" bird in the cattails. Chris Bruce was able to take a couple of beautiful photographs which can be seen on the FWG blog.

Summer breeding season is all but over as I write, apart from the late-nesting goldfinches. Every year it seems we wait for the birds to return and then in the blink of an eye, it is over and they are on their way south once more. On August 8 I knew fall was coming when I saw a fall-plumaged Canada Warbler at FWG!

The Green Herons were the star attraction again in 2007. This year, however, the interest was particularly intense because the herons nested in the garden. Despite attempts to keep this quiet, word spread amongst the photographic community with the result that a well trod trail and a large area of flattened vegetation near the nest site occurred. When the five young fledged and started hanging out at the pond with the adults, interest quickly turned there and more vegetation was trampled as more paths were made down to the water's edge. It was a bit of a relief when the herons finally departed. I can only imagine the fuss that would ensue should a pair of Virginia Rails take up residence in the pond! Apart from all that, I felt quite sorry for the frog population with seven hungry herons stalking them. No wonder they were more silent than usual.

The American Kestrels checked out their nest box a number of times, but in the end they seemed to find a tree cavity a little distance away more to their liking. Or so I suspect, since I don't know for sure. They certainly made their presence known in the spring and again for a brief period in July when a couple of youngsters could be seen and heard near the red barn.

### ***Other Fauna***

As everyone knows, it has been a fantastic year for Monarch butterflies. They returned early and were seen daily in increasing numbers at the FWG. We also found quite a few Monarch caterpillars, a good sign. Other butterflies were also abundant at the garden, in particular Red Admirals. A Striped Hairstreak was briefly seen on Swamp Milkweed in the BYG in July. Eastern-tailed Blues are now regularly observed at FWG and another once rare butterfly appeared at the garden as well. On

July 12, I found a Delaware Skipper near the Pond. Given that this species is turning up all over it was only a matter of time before it arrived at the garden. First found in 1998 by Peter Hall near Burritts Rapids, it has since spread out across the region (Layberry 2007).

I am always delighted by the variety of insects we get at FWG, in addition to the butterflies. Some beautiful moths can be found, including the Hummingbird Moth and the strikingly patterned Confused Haploa. We continue adding more species to our lists of insects, including moths and butterflies. For updated versions of these lists please check out:



[http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/alphabet/insects/index\\_e.php](http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/alphabet/insects/index_e.php) and

[http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/alphabet/moths/index\\_e.php](http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/alphabet/moths/index_e.php).

We've also started an inventory of butterflies at the FWG

<http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/research/inventories/butterflies.html>, based largely on data collected by Peter Hall from 1990 on. Eventually, we hope to prepare similar inventories for other groups of insects, and for all fauna at the garden.

The Chipmunk population in the garden appears to have burgeoned and these cheeky little creatures are quite bold and unconcerned by people presence. This means that we get to watch some really engaging activity. One Chipmunk has discovered that the seedheads of the Cup-plant make good eating and while they lasted, could be found happily munching away. We still have few to no groundhogs these days, but the squirrels and rabbits are more than holding their own and we see them frequently. As fall approaches, the squirrels become more active and the Red Squirrels in particular, once again become very visible.

### **Invasive Species**

Not a summer goes by that we don't think, talk and do something about, invasive

plant species at FWG. In spring, Garlic Mustard occupies us, in early summer and throughout the season, it is Dog-strangling Vine (DSV) or Pale Swallowwort, and in mid-summer it is the aquatics in the pond that demand attention. Work on the latter is done, as always, by Sandy Garland and Diane Lepage, who have been working on Flowering Rush and Frog's Bit for several years now. There are signs that the Flowering Rush may be decreasing somewhat.

As for the DSV, goldenrod continues its work of displacing this aggressive plant. We first noticed the impact of goldenrod (both Canada Goldenrod and Grass-leaved Goldenrod) on DSV last year. This year, we continued assessing the situation and found that the goldenrod was spreading into areas formerly occupied by DSV. It is still too early to say for sure that other plants are now moving into areas occupied by DSV, but the signs are encouraging. For example, there is one small site which was previously occupied only by DSV. It was mowed over the last few years, and in 2006 was scythed several times, leaving only the few goldenrod plants. In 2007, I noticed the goldenrods had expanded. Volunteers again cut around this stand and at the time of writing there is good stand of goldenrod along with abundant Queen Anne's Lace. The DSV seemed to be singularly reduced in number. There is no doubt that DSV remains a tremendous problem, but the work of volunteers, particularly the Sunday morning group, combined with the natural spread of Goldenrod is having some positive impact. Interestingly, the Sunday group has been using scythes to cut the DSV. This works well not only in permitting a fast cut over a large area, but in allowing desirable plants to be spared. Mowing, particularly with the big tractors used in previous years, does not permit such fine-tuning.

### **FWG Volunteers**

People enjoy reading about people, even in a publication devoted to nature, such as ours. They like to put a face to a name, or a name to a face. At the FWG, we have been exceptionally lucky with our volunteers, many of whom stay for years, forming the backbone of the project. In this issue, I will introduce you to **Isabelle Nicol**. Club members who have been around for awhile, will recognize this familiar name, perhaps recalling the charming articles Isabelle wrote for *Trail & Landscape*, about various wildlife species. More recent OFNC members may know Isabelle as the recipient of the Club's 2006 Education Award. This was given in recognition of her work educating students and adults alike in the wonders of the natural world (<http://www.ofnc.ca/awards/2007/nichol.php>)

Isabelle was very much aware of the garden in its early days and even helped out for awhile, but it wasn't until retirement that she began thinking seriously about getting involved. During visits to the garden she'd notice how the garden was evolving and, as she says, "*I saw the wonderful transformation that had taken place. Now, having more time on my hands, I decided I wanted to help out as well, and make some*



contribution (in particular to the Woodland Garden, which has a beautiful assortment of our native woodland flower species)." Isabelle enjoys both gardening and the outdoors and she saw working at FWG as a natural fit for her skills and interests. She notes that *"even the more mundane contributions I can make through*



*weeding and keeping up the appearance of the garden"* are worthwhile and so *"I will help out where the needs are greatest."*

However, Isabelle doesn't confine her activities to the BYG. For several years she has helped with removing invasive species from the Amphibian Pond, and more recently has devoted a lot of time to working on the Butterfly Meadow with the Wednesday evening group, and DSV removal on Sunday mornings. Working at the FWG for over four years, she has seen some positive changes, noting that *"the FWG has been beautified in many ways since I started, with the addition of stone walls, flagstone pathways, a*

*reorganization of the brick patio . . . to give it a more attractive design, and [the addition of] a beautifully crafted bench"* dedicated to Dale Crook.

Like many others, Isabelle is quick to point to the other FWG volunteers as a big reason why working at the garden is so much fun. She says *"I have come to know many of them on a personal basis as we enjoy our Friday morning break over a cup of coffee and a cookie or two, people who add immeasurably to the ambience of the garden."* Isabelle acknowledges that everyone has an important role to play. And, speaking of important roles, Isabelle, in addition to all the above work, has also taken on the role of Interim BYG Coordinator, until we find a new BYG Manager.

When asked what she likes about volunteering at FWG, Isabelle had this to say: *"It is a weekly treat to return and see how the pond, the rockery, and the butterfly, woodland, and heritage gardens, all respond to the care of these enthusiastic volunteers. All contribute greatly in many different ways—and, of course, and most importantly—the beautification of the area, using native plants, shows people how they, too, can provide a backyard habitat, that will attract, and thereby help to preserve, all those creatures that show up regularly in our communal backyards -*

*birds, bees, butterflies, chipmunks, and the errant toad or two, that add so very much to our sense of well-being. Being an apartment dweller, I feel very fortunate, indeed, to have here, in the middle of the city, such a place to make a humble contribution to, that will inspire and help others to see the possibilities in their own backyards."*

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

If you would like to volunteer at the FWG, why not drop by any Friday morning spring through fall, 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon, and see what it is all about. You can talk to the volunteers, explore the garden and get a feel for what we do. You can also discuss other volunteer opportunities at the garden while you are there. There is invasive species control, tree planting, or any number of other activities. Why not contact us? (Details at end of article). Regular volunteer groups meet on Friday morning (BYG), Wednesday evening (Butterfly Meadow) and Sunday morning (the rest of the FWG), spring through fall.

The FWG is run by a Management Committee and we'd be very happy to see new members. You are welcome to drop by one of our regular meetings (always the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of each month, at 7:30 p.m. at FWG) and see what the committee does.

### **FWG Details and Contact Information**

The FWG is located off Prince of Wales Drive on the Central Experimental Farm. For more information please visit the website at:

<http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php>. Brochures about the garden are available from the Centre on Friday mornings from spring through fall, Sunday afternoons in the summer, or during the week June through August when we have a summer employee.

- FWG phone number: 613-234-6767.
  - David Hobden, Chair, FWG Management Committee: [dhobden@magma.ca](mailto:dhobden@magma.ca).
  - Sandy Garland: website and information about the FWG newsletter: [sgarland@magma.ca](mailto:sgarland@magma.ca).
  - Christine Hanrahan: bird and wildlife observations: [vanessa@magma.ca](mailto:vanessa@magma.ca).
- AAFC Security: 613-759-1985

### **Acknowledgements:**

As always, thanks to all the volunteers who make FWG happen!

**Photos:** Christine Hanrahan.

### **References:**

Layberry, Ross. 2007. Butterflies of the Ottawa District: 103 species . . . and counting. *T&L* 41(1): 16-36.

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# Keeping a group notebook: the Macoun Club's Nature Journal

Rob Lee

Those of us go about with our eyes open see something interesting every day. We all know, however, that unless we write it down, the vast majority of our observations gradually lose the significance that goes with their place in time and space, and their richness fades from memory.

But it is so very, very hard to keep notes at all, let alone good ones.

In the Macoun Field Club, we have the special problem of keenly wanting to encourage other people—our young members—to record their observations. We talk about it, try to set a good example in front of them, and even pass out empty notebooks at the start of our field trips. Despite all our efforts, these little books keep turning up forgotten, with just a page or two dutifully—and sketchily—filled in, months, or even years before.

Yet, as a special advantage, the Macoun Club also has a dedicated nature-study area in the Stony Swamp section of Ottawa's Greenbelt, which gives our note-taking special purpose and value.

At the OFNC's 2006 Soirée, the Macoun Club was presented with the Anne Hanes Natural History Award for having examined and documented this same tract of land over the preceding 35-year period. To aid us going forward, we were also presented with a blank NatureJournal kit.

Designed by local naturalists Aleta Karstad and Fred Scheuler, the kit is a small, durable loose-leaf binder whose archival-quality pages are meant to be taken out when full and bound into book format. There are a variety of lined pages for written observations (with extra-wide spacing for children), and blank pages for drawings.

How would we use it? We decided to restrict its focus to our Study Area, which is one of our regular field-trip destinations. Wanting to end up with something that would be quite readable, we developed the practice of writing up the journal pages at leisure afterward from our hastily jotted field notes, and illustrating them by copying over pocket sketches done on the spot. We thought it should be packed with

retrievable information, so we built an index on a computer as we went along.

Each field trip's record begins with a colour-coded vegetation map (originally made by Macoun members years ago), marked up with the day's route and its highlights. The day's forty or fifty observations are numbered sequentially in the margins of the written pages, for precise reference.

A week later, it is surprising how minutely some children will scrutinize the five or six pages of notes, finally looking up to announce, "Rob, you forgot the Garter Snakes!" All of a sudden, an ordinary observation has acquired importance in their eyes. The Garter Snakes get added in.

For who can say that such commonplace observations will not soon prove to have genuine importance? As an example, within the last ten years the Macoun Club has witnessed the complete disappearance of the springtime carpets of White Trillium blossoms from our Study Area that had always seemed an essential feature of Sugar Maple forests. If we hadn't recorded the phenomenon before, how would we be able to say that it is gone now?

Month by month, the journal filled out, until at year's end we set about turning our loose-leaf pages into a book. Everything has been hand-lettered except the index, which was printed out on blank pages and placed at the back of the book. A Table of Contents gave the journal structure and a Preface set out its purpose. A collection of Annual Summaries pulled together all that we had learned by observation for each species of plant or animal and each feature of landscape or ecology.

It proved fairly easy to photocopy the whole journal in sequence, double-sided (as long as the pages were still loose and separate), and then to have as many copies made as we wished. After cutting the letter-sized sheets in half, we had the photocopies bound in hardcover at the same time as the original. At nominal cost, we were able to provide a copy of the year's journal to every member and leader who wanted one.

For the 2007 journal, we purchased more pages, and had some customized for our purposes. This time around, there are more drawings and more of them are coloured in (by pencil). We carry a copy of the previous year's journal with us, for handy reference in the field; then everybody can see where we're going with this project.

When you're a child, much more than when you're grown up, it is so hard to see what the point is. You don't know what to write down, or what to say about it. For many, even the physical act of writing is a challenge. Then, too, children have such an extraordinary memory for detail that they can't imagine forgetting anything—not

even a few snakes or a frog.

But in time, almost all of us do forget. By providing our members with a written, illustrated record of a place they all know, and of field trips they took part in, we hope they will come to value this nature journal so much that they will want to keep one of their own.

Editor's Note: The NatureJournal sells for \$41.15 and may be obtained at:

Bishops Mills Natural History Centre

30 Main St, Bishops Mills, RR#2

Oxford Station, Ontario K0G 1T0

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## Sparrows

You little sparrows, grey birds of dust and need,  
Without bright colours or sweet melodies,  
My muse will tri-li-li for you. She sees  
Your deprivation, she will intercede.

But first she will throw you crusts of bread. Pik-pik,  
Little fellows, hop-hop. Enjoy, have fun;  
Here is the thing that's known to everyone:  
Poverty is lighter with a hoedown and a jig.

My muse has a sip of water, curtsies, and begins:  
"In the gardens and the fields are poppies red as sins,  
The open bleeding wounds of mother earth.

The eagle hugs the clouds, the nightingale his shrub,  
And you, you little sparrows, have your own place in the club.  
Have pleasure in the role that is assigned to you from birth."

This poem, written by Itzik Manger, was published in *Lid Un Balade* (1961). It was kindly translated from Yiddish and submitted by Club member Murray Citron for our enjoyment.

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# How Did Darth Vader Get into the Act

*Jack Holliday*

Currently, at our house, we have an orchid in bloom. Six flowers. It is probably an *Odontoglossum* (I lost the label). Some call it the "Spider Orchid" for its resemblance to that creature (using a lot of imagination). You orchid experts will know what it is.

Orchid flowers are remarkable for their bizarre methods of pollination. Some entice insects to the flower for nectar, but once the flower is "entered," the insect is held captive and forced to leave by a special exit, meanwhile being dabbed with pollen, which the insect then carries to another flower.

On examination "my" orchid has a central part which, I think, resembles the head-helmet of "Darth Vader" (Fig. 1). (Imagination is required once again). By

experimentation, discovery was made that the "helmet" was easily detached (Fig. 2) and revealed a pair of yellow anthers, one assumes pollen covered (Fig. 3).

Further "poking around" with tweezers, caused the anthers to become glued to them (Fig. 4). Attempts to remove the anthers revealed that they were attached to the glue-like base by an elastic thread which stretched to its breaking point at about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch or so (Fig. 5).

My thoughts on the pollination mechanism of this orchid are as follows:



*Figure 1*



*Figure 2*



*Figure 3*



*Figure 4*



*Figure 5*

- A. The insect is attracted to the flower to obtain nectar.
- B. The insect lands on the spotted lip and must crawl over "Darth Vader" to reach the nectar source (Fig. 1).
- C. "Darth's" helmet dislodges (Fig. 2), exposing the anthers (Fig. 3).
- D. The anthers become "glued" to the underside of the insect as it approaches or leaves the nectar source (Figs. 4 and 5).
- E. The insect flies to the next flower with the pollen attached.
- F. The insect lands on the spotted lip of the next flower, crawls over the stigma on its way to the nectar source.
- G. While walking over the stigma, the pollen from the last flower is transferred and fertilization is successful.

I placed the plant outside to see if any local insect would be attracted to it. No "helmets" were dislodged, so I must assume that no insect accepted the invitation.

Perhaps in the orchid's home country there are insects adapted to pollinate this flower?

If you have a "Spider Orchid" at hand, you too can examine the flowers and see if you arrive at the same conclusions.

Interesting!





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# Unusual Silvery Blue in Larose Forest

*Diane Lepage*

On June 9, 2007 a Bio-blitz took place in Larose Forest. I arrived earlier so I could have a chance to observe butterflies and hoped to be able to do some photography. I parked my car at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> concession and walked for a couple of hours looking at insects that would sit long enough to be photographed. On my way back to the car, a small blue butterfly caught my attention. The flight pattern was a little different. When it landed on plants low to the ground I bent down, slowly approached it and was able to photograph and watch for a short time. This was a fresh butterfly with black dots much bigger than usual—I had never seen any butterfly with such marking before and this was very exciting. Since I didn't have a digital camera and I was not sure that my photos would be successful, I decided that I should capture it to have a better chance of getting it identified. I put my hat on top of the butterfly, but it flew away onto another plant. This time I got a film bottle out and fortunately it stayed for me to put it in the bottle. I then hurried to the Forestry Station, which was the headquarters for the event. When I walked in I was delighted to see Ross Layberry, one of the authors of the book *The Butterflies of Canada*.

I showed him and Christine Hanrahan, the Bio-blitz organizer, the little blue butterfly. They too were very puzzled. Ross could not identify it, nor had he ever seen anything like it before. So he asked if he could bring it to the experimental farm, for DNA testing. I agreed.

The conclusion of the test revealed that the upper



*Photo by D. Lepage*

side is clearly that of a female Silvery Blue, with absolutely no distortions in the pattern. It would be considered an aberrant\* Silvery Blue. The going explanation of pattern changes in butterfly wings relates to exposure of either the larval or pupal stages to unusual damaging occurrences such as extremes of temperature (either too hot or too cold).



*Photo by Ross Layberry*

When observing butterflies it is important to stop and look all small blue butterflies, because you never know what you can find. With the warmer summers we could come across species never seen in the Ottawa Areas or one with different marking.



*Photo by Ross Layberry*

This is how I was able to see the Eastern Tailed Blue a few years ago.

\*ABERRANT.- Forms or groups of animals or plants which deviate in important characters from their nearest allies, so as not to be easily included in the same group with them, are said to be aberrant.

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# Red Foxes at the Fletcher Wildlife Garden

*Christine Hanrahan*

The Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) has been called the cat-like canine, an apt description for this graceful animal with its many feline characteristics.

Red Foxes have been around the Central Experimental Farm (CEF) for many decades. Den sites are found in various locations, including some old ones at the FWG. The Red Fox that we see in North America is considered the same species as that found in Europe, Asia and parts of Africa. It



*Red Fox. Photo by Jim Robertson*

is also found in Australia where it was introduced about a hundred years ago by British immigrants, presumably so they could continue their passion for fox-hunting. At one time, the North American Red Fox was thought to have been a separate species from that found elsewhere.

## **Habits**

The sight of a fox in an urban setting still surprises many. No doubt because, although long associated with human habitation, they are so adept at being invisible. Their range extends across much of North America where they live in a variety of habitats. Open or semi-open areas similar to that of the CEF, as well as woodlands and forest openings, are all used. It is thought that red foxes "*do best, that is, become most abundant, in country that is varied—land that is made up of a patchwork of woodlots, open meadows, dense brushlands, pastures, and small wetlands. The*

*more diverse an area, the more red foxes seem to thrive in it.*" (Henry 1996). The FWG contains all of these elements, but of course, in miniature. We could, however, use our site to show what optimum fox habitat looks like!

### **Description**

The fox is the size of a small dog, weighing 3.6-6.8 kg and measuring approximately 1-1.2m in length including tail (Banfield 1974, Forsyth 1985). The very light, slender skeletal structure of this animal, has evolved to allow speed and agility of movement by decreasing body weight without sacrificing muscle or size.

The name 'red fox' is apt, for their coat is a deep, rich, glossy rufus, except for the chest, abdomen and tip of the tail, which are white. The ears are black, as are the lower legs giving the impression the fox is wearing dark socks. The fur is beautifully thick and dense, and the tail is a magnificent, bushy, plume. Colour variations exist, including a melanistic or black phase. Foxes showing a black coat with white-tipped guard hairs are called 'silver foxes'. Another variant is called the 'cross-fox', named for the unusual dark 'cross' over its shoulders. I've seen only the typical red fox pelage around the FWG and the farm.

The fox has many feline qualities, including the ability to flex and partially retract its claws. It also has longer whiskers (vibrissae) than other canines, both on the muzzle and the carpal joints (wrist). Henry (1996) postulates that the whiskers "*function as tactile organs. The muzzle vibrissae may help to guide the fox's capture and killing bites, and the carpal vibrissae may assist the fox during stalking.*" Foxes also have a very feline way of hunting. They stalk their prey, often slinking low to the ground, before pouncing or giving chase. And unlike most canids, they are comfortable walking along fallen logs, or even half-climbing small trees, in which their superb sense of balance serves them well. A fox partially climbed an elderberry shrub (*Sambucus racemosa*) at FWG to grab a grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*). So similar are they to cats, that in the past there was speculation as to whether they were true canids. Today we know they are indeed canids.

Whether in play, or in earnest pursuit of food, foxes move with an elegance and grace that is pure poetry in motion. It has always amazed me how this animal can spring from a supine position and flee like the wind, "*floating over windfallen trees and dense underbrush, as if it were half bird*" in the words of Henry (1996).

Although capable of loud, high-pitched barking, foxes are usually silent except in breeding season when they bark to attract a mate, or when they warn intruders away from their cubs. Henry (1993) describes the sound as "*a slightly drawn-out wail*" that will carry for over 1 km. He notes that the bark is given "*once or twice per minute in a series of 5-15 repetitions.*"

# Call for Nominations for OFNC Awards

The Awards Committee

It is time to think back and consider those OFNC members (and, in one case, even non-members) who, by virtue of their special efforts and talents, are deserving of special recognition.

The Club has six awards: Honorary Membership, Member of the Year Award, George McGee Service Award, Conservation Award for OFNC Members, Conservation Award for Non-Members, and the Anne Hanes Natural History Award. A seventh award, the Education Award, was presented for the first time a few years ago. At a time when dedicated and effective natural history educators, both professional and amateur, are both under-appreciated and under-funded, the OFNC wants to draw attention to the importance of natural history education in schools and in our community at large. The award is described in its own section below.

An elaboration of each of these categories is presented in this centre-fold, together with space to put the nominee's name and accomplishments. (Additional sheets can be used if needed.) If necessary, the Awards Committee will seek out more information on individuals nominated, but of course, the more information you provide, the easier it is for the committee to make a decision. An informative article on the background of these awards, and a list of recent recipients, was published in Volume 33, Number 4, of *Trail & Landscape*. Last year's awardees are highlighted in the previous issue of *T&L*. The deadline for the submission of nominations is December 31, 2007. Nominate as many individuals as you like, but be sure to give your reasons. Return the nomination form to the Chair of the Awards Committee:

Dr. Irwin Brodo  
28 Benson Street  
Ottawa, ON K2E 5J5

If you have any questions regarding the nominations, feel free to contact Irwin Brodo, Chair of the Awards Committee, at 723-2054, or at [ibrodo@sympatico.ca](mailto:ibrodo@sympatico.ca).

# NOMINATION FORM FOR AWARDS

## The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club

In the appropriate spaces, please submit the names of those you wish to nominate for OFNC awards and your reasons for each nomination. The more information you provide, the more effective will be the assessment of nominees. Attach additional information if the space is inadequate. Nominations may be made for more than one person. The Awards Committee may contact you for further information regarding any of your nominations.

Name of Nominator: \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

**HONORARY MEMBER:** This award is presented in recognition of outstanding contributions by a member, or non-member, to Canadian natural history or to the successful operation of the Club. [Usually people awarded an honorary membership have made extensive contributions over many years. At present honorary membership is limited to 25 people.]

Nominee \_\_\_\_\_

Reasons for the nomination \_\_\_\_\_

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**MEMBER OF THE YEAR:** In recognition of the member judged to have contributed the most to the Club in the previous year. [Members of the Executive are excluded from consideration.]

Nominee \_\_\_\_\_

Reasons for the nomination \_\_\_\_\_

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**GEORGE MCGEE SERVICE AWARD:** In recognition of a member or members who has (have) contributed significantly to the smooth running of the Club over several years. [Members of the Executive are excluded from consideration.]

Nominee \_\_\_\_\_

Reasons for the nomination \_\_\_\_\_

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**ANNE HANES NATURAL HISTORY AWARD:** In recognition of a member who, through independent study or investigation, has made a worthwhile contribution to our knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the natural history of the Ottawa Valley. [The award is designed to recognize work that is done by amateur naturalists.]

Nominee \_\_\_\_\_

Reasons for the nomination \_\_\_\_\_

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**EDUCATION AWARD:** For members, non-members or organizations, in recognition for outstanding achievements in the field of natural history education in the Ottawa Region. Potential recipients would include museum personnel (both professional and volunteer), biology teachers, talented and dedicated field trip leaders, authors popularizing local natural history, and other educators of children or adults.

Nominee: \_\_\_\_\_

Reasons for nomination: \_\_\_\_\_

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Foxes are primarily nocturnal, although they are often abroad in daylight during the winter and when hungry young need to be fed. The best time to see them is very early in the morning, when they are returning from a night's hunting, or after sunset when they are setting out. One early morning encounter remains in my mind as clear today as 30 years ago. It was mid-December and I was snowshoeing across a field east of the city just as day was breaking. Becoming aware of movement ahead I stopped to focus my binoculars. The enchanting sight of three foxes playing met my eyes. Leaping, chasing, jumping, lunging, and stalking each other, there can be no other word to describe what they were doing. It was a remarkable performance, ending only when they got wind of me and melted quietly away. I'm sure they were that year's young, and I decided they must have had a successful hunt and were celebrating. But that of course, is to anthropomorphize them.

### **Watching Foxes**

The most remarkable thing about foxes, is their ability to remain unseen while living in highly disturbed sites. The CEF is a good example. Foxes have been around the farm almost continuously for many decades, and yet they are seen infrequently. They raise their young, dig dens, hunt, and leave signs of their presence throughout the area, but are themselves largely invisible. I have been watching the foxes on the farm for over a decade and even when I know where to look, catching a glimpse is more often down to luck, not diligence. Many of my sightings have been after dark, when, on moonlit nights, I might catch sight of a fox moving swiftly across the landscape. However, with more than 30 years of fox-watching, I've also had numerous daytime sightings.

Females hang around their dens prior to giving birth and can often be seen during the day. I've come across foxes sleeping against the base of a knoll in daylight hours, or wandering along back roads. One August afternoon in 2006 while walking around the CEF, I noticed a big flock of crows cawing loudly, clearly in hot pursuit of something, for they were flying relatively low and moving in formation across the cornfields. Sure enough, out of the corn burst a very beleaguered fox. The last I saw, he'd ducked into yet another cornfield with the crows pointing out his presence to all and sundry. The same thing happened at the FWG in early May, 2007, when a large gathering of crows chased a fox into the ravine.

In 2002, fox observations were at an all time high at FWG. Tracks and scat were found everywhere, and visitors to the garden often told us, with some wonder, that they had seen a fox. Years prior to 2002-2003 yielded fox sightings, but never so many or as consistently.

In 2004 sightings dropped dramatically, and the one fox I did see was obviously suffering from mange, and clearly unwell. This same animal was last seen at FWG in

winter 2004. A short while later, I found him dead in the New Woods. I saw no foxes on the farm until January 2006. Foxes are particularly susceptible to mange a serious problem for this species as its impact on local populations can be severe.

The winter of 2006-2007, brought a welcome increase in fox activity, including a pair at one of the traditional den sites. We continue to find evidence or see animals at FWG, but not as often as in earlier times. I suspect the increase in visitors (both human and canine) is making the garden less attractive to these cautious animals.

### **Predators**

Foxes prey on a variety of animals, but are themselves preyed upon by bigger, stronger species. Once again, humans are the greatest threat. Knowing this, isn't it surprising that they have chosen to live amongst us? At the FWG, dogs are the only real threat, mostly because they give chase causing them to give up hunting for periods of time. We're next on the list, with our cars speeding down Prince of Wales Drive. I have seen several young killed on this road. One was opposite the entrance to the FWG and presumably had been either coming to, or leaving, the garden. In the wilder areas, coyotes and bobcats are the chief predators on this small canid.

### **Feeding Habits**

The main food of the Red Fox is rodents, and at the FWG and the farm this means meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), mice (*Peromyscus* sp.), groundhogs (*Marmota monax*), squirrels (Sciuridae), and cottontail rabbits (*Sylvilagus floridanus*). However, foxes are omnivores, eating a great variety of food. Banfield (1974) notes that small mammals "*form the principal prey, constituting about 37 % of the diet.*" Birds "*constitute about 20 % . . . invertebrates . . . about 26 % . . . and plant material*" approximately 16 %. Other items such as snakes, frogs and fish make up the rest. Foxes are opportunistic, taking what is most readily available. Not surprisingly then, rodents form the bulk of their winter food, while in summer plant material including fruit, nuts, and seeds is added to their diet of mammals, insects and other foods.

The chief activity of foxes is, naturally, hunting. Around the FWG, I've seen them stalking and catching small rodents, particularly in the Old Field and New Woods areas. Very occasionally I've seen them eating apples under the few domestic apple trees (*Malus* sp.) in the garden.

Foxes have excellent hearing and sense of smell. Fergus (2006) says that they can hear a mouse squeal from up to 45 metres away. In winter, their ability to hear animals moving under deep snow, combined with their quick reflexes, gives them an edge. Interestingly, research has shown that their remarkable hearing is attuned more to lower frequency sounds rather than, as in most other animals, higher pitches.

Henry (1996) says that studies show "*these frequencies correspond to the rustling and gnawing sounds small mammals make.*"

One morning, I saw a fox feeding on a roadkill groundhog opposite the FWG entrance. Fearing that the fox might be hit as traffic picked up, I dragged the groundhog off the road. The fox ran when I approached, but later returned and continued feeding. The various rabbits, squirrels and groundhogs that fall victim to dogs around the site, don't often remain long. Dogs probably scavenge some, but much more likely is that the foxes are feeding on the remains, or caching them. For foxes will, like many canids, cache food under snow, leaves or soil.

Henry (1996) says that these three methods, scavenging, hunting and caching are "*the three prongs of the fox's livelihood (and) combine it with its variable diet to make this animal the most adaptable creature.*" I haven't stumbled across a fox cache at the FWG, but that doesn't mean they are not there. I'd expect them more around the less visited areas of the farm.

### **Territory and Home Range**

Foxes are non-migratory and occupy the same territory year-round, usually marking their boundaries with urine to let other foxes know an area is occupied. Availability of food and suitable habitat determine how many foxes a site can support. Foxes are generally solitary animals, except during breeding season. At that time the pair, and later their cubs, occupy a home range that can vary from a few hectares to thousands of hectares. Banfield (1974) gives an average home range of about 360 to 800 ha, depending on food and shelter availability. Compare this to studies done around Oxford, England, where the food-rich environment supports one fox family per 10 ha (Henry 1993). At the other extreme, research in southeastern Iran, has shown that a fox family would inhabit a territory of about 5,000 ha, reflecting the difficulty of finding food in such a harsh desert environment (Henry 1993).

I have not found more than one fox family on the Central Experimental Farm, although I have been told that in some years there are two family groups. I do know that the area west of Merivale Rd., which once belonged to CEF and is now the site of the Central Park subdivision, held a pair of breeding foxes. When the bulldozers moved in, they disrupted a den site and sent the female fleeing with her young.

It may be that since the foxes use several locations, observers have assumed two separate families. Or there may occasionally be two family groups. In years when the vole and rabbit populations peak there *might* be enough food to support two families. The cycles of vole and rabbit don't necessarily coincide, and a peak year for rabbits may be a poor year for voles. One thing is for certain, the FWG alone is not

big enough to maintain a single fox, let alone a family. It is the addition of the farm and the Arboretum with the FWG that provides adequate territory for the farm foxes.

### Reproduction

During the breeding season, sometime in January or February, I check out the den sites at the farm to see if any are occupied. As winter progresses, the female may be found sleeping or resting on top of the den itself.

### Dens and Den Sites

Many den sites are located on the side of a mound or rise, especially those in open areas. I used to think this was for safety (greater visibility over the surrounding area), but Henry (1996) says these locations are probably preferred because *"the hillside location and nearby open area, may make for a site where snow melts early, frost leaves the ground quickly and drainage is always good."* The den sites I've seen over the years have been in a variety of locations, including on a very obvious knoll, under cedar trees, in thickets, along fencerows with a thin scattering of trees, in belts of conifers, in woodlands, and in agricultural lands. They seem to prefer sandy soil where possible.

Typically foxes will have several dens in close proximity so that if danger, perceived or real, arises they can move their young to a safer site. A den site usually has two entrances, some have three. Foxes may tolerate a lot of disruption, or they may move at the first hint of disturbance. Henry (1996) records unwittingly causing a female to move her young when he *"crossed an invisible but important vulpine boundary"* in his attempt to get photographs. In 1982, Theresa Aniśkiewicz came across a vixen moving her cubs from one den to another near Ramsayville Marsh. She was able to carefully watch, follow and photograph this family over the course of the summer, from the time the cubs were tiny and still without their red pelage, until they grew old

enough to be more wary of the world (Aniśkiewicz 1983).



Some den sites may be occupied for years. Several sites on the CEF have been used for at least a decade, and probably much longer. The animals seem to alternate usage between

*Fox den, CEF. Photo by C. Hanrahan.*

several den sites every few years.

During the winter, dens will be cleaned or modified in preparation for birth. New dens may be dug, but often they will take over an old groundhog burrow and enlarge it. I know that at least three of the den sites I've found on the CEF, have been previously used by groundhogs. I don't know if the dens were still occupied when the foxes took possession. However, Banfield (1974) notes "*an unusual interspecific tolerance between the red fox and the woodchuck, with both species occupying the same burrow, has been described.*" No doubt this is a rare occurrence given that groundhogs are a favoured prey item! Hollow logs are sometimes used. Elbroch (2003) says entrances may be anywhere from 15-30.5 cm in diameter. The dens I've measured on the farm, have ranged from 15 cm to more than 45cm.

At the FWG, there are several very old sites, probably used in the days before the area became so busy and disturbed. One is enclosed in what is now a thicket of trees and shrubs. This particular den had several entrances, one quite large. Another den was on a steep slope, invisible to most people, as it is well protected by trees and its location. Yet another den was under a clump of conifers, but has since almost vanished, filled in by leaves, needles and other debris.

### Youngsters

Gestation takes about 51 days (51-53 days) (Banfield 1974, Forsyth 1985, Henry 1996). The kits or pups, weigh approximately 100 g when born (Banfield 1974) and are dark gray, charcoal or dark brown. During the 1970s, in the Dunrobin area, I found a fox den in a hollow log; nearby was a dead kit, probably not more than a couple of weeks old. It was entirely black. For the first 10 days, according to most sources, the pups are blind and helpless. However, they develop quickly and in no more than a month are able to leave the den. It is not

uncommon to see them playing around the site, always under the watchful eye

of mother. By this time, they have attained the orangey-red pelage that we associate with the species. One year I counted five youngsters at a den site on the CEF, but typically I have not seen more than three or four. Banfield (1974) and others give the average litter size as five.



Young Fox. Photo by Gwen Williams

In 2007, I counted three young kits at one of the traditional CEF fox dens (although given the distance and the difficulty in viewing, there may have been one more kit). I had been checking several times a week (from a great distance, using binoculars) and regularly saw the adults. Finally, I was rewarded by seeing the young. In late April they were still a grayish-charcoal, tiny, rotund and wobbly. At this point they were probably about a month old. By mid-May they were already getting bigger and assuming their rusty red pelage. Quite often I'd see the adults splayed out by the den, as if too tired to move. I fancied that between food seeking for the family and taking care of extremely energetic cubs, they were bushed!

There is nothing quite so adorable as a young fox. A few years ago I came across three of them on the CEF, playing tug-of-war with a green garbage bag. They were making little growling sounds, and every so often one of them pulled loose a piece of the plastic and went flying backwards. I watched them for about two minutes before their mother got wind of me and gave a warning bark. The females are naturally very protective, and several other times I've been treated to examples of their vigilance. Once my dog and I were 'chased' off by a very determined and very vocal vixen. When we had moved to a safe distance, she sat down and continued watching, as if to say "And don't come back!" A few weeks later, I saw a couple of young kits close by this same site. In the fall, I went back and poked around the area. Sure enough, there was a den, now unoccupied, well hidden by shrubs.

Given their hunting skills, ingenuity and adaptability, one would think that foxes, if they can avoid predators, should live a relatively long life in the wild, but this doesn't seem to be the case. Banfield (1974) says that tagging experiments "*indicated a longevity of at least three years, but there seems to be a large turnover each year.*" Forsyth (1985) concurs with this number but adds that they have the potential to live up to 12 years.

At summer's end, the young will disperse to find their own territory. Banfield (1974) notes that some males will disperse up to 267 km, although the average distance is 69km. Some will not make it past their first winter, victims perhaps of ears, predators, disease, or starvation if they have not learned to successfully hunt. Some may return to the farm the following year and take over their natal den if the adults have left or died. But one thing is for sure, if we allow these animals to do so, successive generations will remain at the farm, raise their young and take care of business by controlling the rodent populations. You could say, they earn their keep.

### **Winter**

Winter is a harsh time for all animals. Those who do not hibernate, must contend with finding shelter and enough food to survive until spring. Foxes are more adept than many at getting through the winter thanks to their ability to find and catch

rodents. At this time of year, meadow voles and mice, active throughout the winter, form the greater part of their diet. Yet finding enough of this tiny prey to fuel their energy requirements means the fox spends long hours hunting which in turn uses up precious resources.

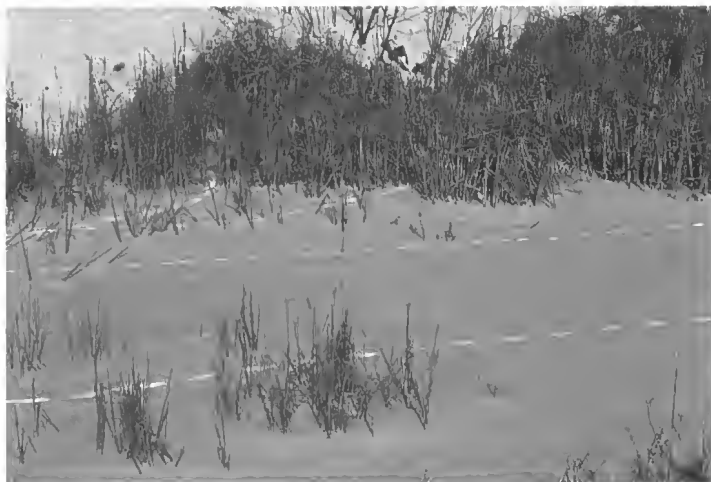
When a fox detects a rodent beneath the snow (or in the grass), it will pounce or lunge (two very distinct and different movements) and either pin the animal down with its paws or grab with its mouth. I've seen them doing this at FWG, along with some very quick frantic digging through the snow to reach their prey.

Foxes also prey on rabbits and squirrels in the winter. To catch these animals they must be fast. I've watched them stalking and chasing squirrels which are remarkably good at eluding capture. Rabbits rely on stillness to avoid detection, but are no match for the fox with its keen senses. I found an area on the CEF where a well worn and scat-littered rabbit trail ran from a small burrow in the midst of a raspberry thicket to a stand of sumac on which it fed. Not long afterwards, I found only a few scattered rabbit remains along with some fox scat. It looked like the fox dined well.

Finding warm, secure shelter is also important for animals in winter. Opinion varies as to whether dens are used at this time of year. Foxes can be found curled up under shrubs, usually against a knoll, brushy tail covering their nose, sometimes covered in snow. Henry (1993) says that they will use dens throughout the year, to escape inclement weather including heavy rains and summer storms, as well as for protection from frigid winter weather. I've noticed foxes investigating dens around the farm during the winter, some of which show signs of active use. One winter, several volunteers at the FWG made it their mission to see if they could find out whether foxes were using a well protected den in the garden. A fox was seen in the vicinity many times, and fresh tracks on the snow led to and away from the den. This led to speculation that the animal was using the den at least some of the time. From what I have seen, I would say that foxes do use dens in winter.

During the winter of 2002-2003, we often saw a fox during the day, along the trails, near the pond, in the BYG catching squirrels or other prey, or napping under sumacs on the south side of the ravine. For several weeks this individual curled up in the same ravine spot, directly opposite the Interpretive Centre and visible from several windows. Occasionally a dog would scent it and give chase. Perhaps this happened once too often, because eventually the fox vanished from that location, presumably finding somewhere quieter and more protected.

The Red Fox is a remarkable and beautiful animal, the sight of which is always enchanting. Their adaptability to new situations and to a diversity of habitats, as well as their legendary ingenuity, has made them true survivors. If you have observed foxes around the FWG or the farm, I'd love to hear from you at [vanessa@magma.ca](mailto:vanessa@magma.ca).



*Fox tracks on pond, FWG. Photo by C. Hanrahan.*

#### **Acknowledgments:**

Many thanks to Gwen Williams and Jim Robertson for their great photos of foxes.

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# Sunrise Effect

*Robert Nero*

Warm July afternoon  
walking back to the car  
while the dog explores afar  
casting my eyes downward  
blinking in the bright light  
suddenly a swift shadow  
flits across the path  
look up in surprise  
as a large dragonfly skims past  
on gauzy transparent wings  
glad to be reminded that  
even such a fragile form  
casts so solid a shadow.

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# Forceful Impression

*Robert Nero*

A delicate small thump form outside  
on the windowpane right beside me  
not a bird this time, a dragonfly  
intently pursuing prey: mosquitos!  
Dragonfly coming too far too fast.  
I hadn't realized they could bump so keenly  
but then I'd overlooked a determined head  
that shimmering, darting gauziness  
limited only to the wings.

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# Falcon Watch 2007 Final Report

*Eve Ticknor*

Having had a very late start to the season last year, I was very happy to find that Diana had laid her eggs during the normal period for Ottawa's Peregrine family, in early April. This meant that we would not have to run the Falcon Watch during the hot summer. Thank you, Diana!

Over the next few weeks I watched from the roof of Constitution Square Tower 1 to monitor her progress, or is it the progress of her eggs? Connor took his turns at brooding, always alert and seeming to be discomfited, rather than dozing off as his mate would. There were times I knew activity was happening in the penthouse of the Crowne Plaza Hotel as whichever adult who was brooding would suddenly look up at the roof over the nest, moving its head along with where the activity was taking place. Sure enough, if I raised my binoculars to the windows there, I could see movement. It didn't seem to bother the falcons too much, though. At this point I had met our new MNR Biologist, Deb Jacobs, who is in replacing Shaun Thompson. I took her to the roof with me to show her where the nest was. She was surprised to see how close we could actually get as she had assisted in London where the scope is set up quite far away.

When Diana seemed to be less relaxed on her nest, I knew hatching was commencing. And, then came the day when I saw a tiny white fuzzy head upturned with Diana's head turned downwards, gently touching the tiny beak. I will never tire of that scene, knowing what fierce birds these are.

Now it was time to get going on plans for this year's Watch. Not that we hadn't already been making contacts. Melanie had started on the volunteer list already and increased her calling as soon as she knew we had eggs. It was slow-going this year as many of the people called or emailed did not get back to her for a long time. This is the first year we officially started the Watch with much less than full compliment on shifts. In fact, many shifts has not one person! How startling that fact was. Thank goodness our chicklet didn't try his wings out during those shifts! He did surprise us on the morning of the first shift by getting up on the ledge rather than showing only the top of his head. He soon was spending lots of time moving from one end of the nest ledge to the other so fast that we surmised he was running along the inside. Sure enough, we eventually saw him running along the top of the ledge on a regular basis. He did love to run!

During our shifts, we also watched the various wildlife around us. For a few days we had a young groundhog next to the Scone Witch, along with a family of three young squirrels, singing House Finches, House Sparrow families, two pigeons and, briefly, a mother Crow with her very loud youngsters. The city is not just people!

Deb has said to me earlier that there would be no banding off the ledge as in the past, but, unlike last year, if our chicklet was rescued, banding could happen at that time. Bill Petrie was keeping an eye, and ear, open as he was to do the banding. For quite a while it looked as if he would be out of luck.

Fledging happened on Day 6, late in the day. Melanie got into full swing, calling everyone to us help for the search. Nearly every year, there is a big search to find our chicklet. This year was no different. We went home that night not knowing where he was, and resumed searching first thing. An hour went by. Where was he? Then a call from Mary. Joan had spotted him on a window ledge at the Marriott. He paced back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Who knows what triggers the first flight, or the second, but eventually he was off again. This time he ended up on a tiny ledge on Constitution Square Tower 1 at the 11<sup>th</sup> floor level. And there he stayed for a very long time. His parents were attentive, trying their best to get him flying again. After all, falcons are supposed to be up high, and he was not high enough for them. They did feed him during this time, trying to use food as an incentive, although giving in too soon in our opinions. Once we watched as Diana landed on the ledge next to his, with only a few inches between them, dangling a starling in her beak (come and get it style). He just flapped his wings and screamed but didn't hop over such a short distance. She waved the starling, but still no deal, so she gave in and hopped over to him.

And so we continued to watch until he left the ledge, following him from one stop to another during his fledging period. By now, Bill and I had taken good looks at him and, comparing him to his parents, knew for sure we had a male. Somewhere along the way, he gained the name of Skylar, chosen by Marian.

On Day 9, while I was at work, he tried landing on the nest ledge but failed and eventually ended up on the ground on Sparks St where Chris tried to grab him. No dice! He wasn't going to be caught, so he moved over to the arch at Memorial Buildings, but was picked up by Chris at last and brought to the Constitution Square to wait for Bill, who was happily on his way. Yvon Morin secured an empty room where the banding took place at last. Skylar was then taken up to the nest ledge to show off his new jewelry to his parents.

Soon he was off again, this time staying high, especially on the antenna of the Carlisle Building, his favourite perch in the days to come. Although we doubted he would need rescuing again, we kept watch, just in case. We saw him flying back and forth, small flights at first, then longer. One evening, after flying during the day, he attempted the nest ledge again. It isn't an easy ledge to land on as it needs very accurate angles to get in under that roof. He tried twice, missing it both times. Soon it was evident his wings were tiring, and we all got ready to run to his rescue. Not needed. Diana came along and guided him up to the roof of Constitution Square by flying just under him as if to lift him up herself! What a tender moment for the watchers. In the days to come, we saw flying and hunting lessons. One of these was right over my head as I was standing outside the Scone Witch with Heather. We looked up as there was lots of screaming and saw what we thought were four falcons flying around. Soon it was evident that one was a pigeon, being chased by Skylar! Although he was unsuccessful, Diana had food in her talon, which he went after right away. He grabbed it from her and flew off. However, Connor came and grabbed it away from Skylar who flew off after his father and took it back, successful at "hunting." Others of us got to see him continuing his flying and hunting lessons with his parents.

And, so, we came to the end of this year's Falcon Watch, happy to know that he was doing so well. Peregrine means wanderer, and so he will over the next year or more until he finds his own territory and mate. For anyone who did not have an opportunity to follow Skylar's journey from hatching through fledging, please find our Daily Reports at <http://www.ofnc.ca> and follow the links for Falcon Watch 2007.

We owe a big Thank You to Melanie for all the hard work she puts into this annual project of ours, especially asking to come back to do this again after having lived away for a few years! I also am thankful to all the following, each of whom has done his or her part in helping Skylar along during the first months of his existence. We are blessed to have all of you involved!

#### Volunteers

Owen Averill	Suzanne Deschênes	Scott Holliday
Claudette Bernatchez	Doreen Duchesne	Mary Hurley
Marian Bird	Chris Earland	Lene Kollgard
Roseanne Bishop	Jeanette Gallina	Heidi Laing
Janet Castle	Ann Gibson	Josee Lepine
Barbara Chouinard	Christine Grant	Phil Maillard
Joyce Colotelo	Claire Haas	Dominique Marshall
Marc D'Aoust	Gordon Hippert	Elsa Marshall

Frank Marshall  
Gillian Marston  
Joy Mauthe  
Jordan Montoya  
Lorraine Montoya  
Melanie Moore

Jim O'Neil  
Bev Peterkin  
Frank Pope  
Nancy Scott  
Langis Sirois  
Jennifer Spallin

Kaarina Stiff  
Eve Ticknor  
Chris Traynor  
Sean Van Steinburg  
Gilles Vautour  
Austin Taverner

**Thank You's to:**

Alterna Bank Staff

Bob Boisvert

Crowne Plaza Hotel - Christine Grace and Staff

Constitution Square - Ian Fisher, Yvon Morin & Security Staff

Nadine Fox

Sandy Garland

Susan Goods

Lyn Hadley

Deb Jacobs, MNR

Bernie Ladouceur

Elizabeth Legeyt

Marriott Ottawa Staff

Bill Petrie

Joan Remsu, Justice Canada

Scone Witch - Heather Matthews & Staff

Ashley MacKenzie

Robin Roscoe, Lynwood Animal Hospital (always ready but not used this year thank goodness!)

All the downtown Ottawa office workers and residents who are our eyes on the ground and in the sky!

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# Annual Fall and Christmas Bird Counts

*Chris Lewis*

## **Ottawa-Gatineau Fall Bird Count**

The 2007 Fall Bird Count will be held Saturday October 20 - Sunday October 21, beginning at 3:00 PM on the Saturday, and ending at 3:00 PM on the Sunday. The post-count dinner and compilation will be held at the Fletcher Wildlife Garden Interpretive Centre from approximately 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM. Participants for the Ontario side may contact Eve Ticknor at 613-737-7551, email *sandbird@magma.ca*. Those who wish to participate on the Québec side may contact Garry McNulty at 819-684-9861, email *gmcnulty@videotron.ca*.

## **Ottawa-Gatineau and Dunrobin-Breckenridge Christmas Bird Counts**

This year's Ottawa-Gatineau CBC will be held on Sunday December 16. Please contact Eve Ticknor (see above) to participate on the Ontario side. For the Québec side, please contact Daniel St-Hilaire at 819-776-0860, email *savannarum@videotron.ca*. The various sector leaders have not yet been determined, however the aforementioned contact people should be able to provide more information closer to the date of the event. Details re: the post-count compilations and dinner will be provided by the sector leaders.

**The Dunrobin-Breckenridge CBC** will be held on Saturday December 22. Please contact Bruce Di labio at 613-839-4395 email *bruce.dilabio@sympatico.ca*

All of the above are great local events in the Ottawa-Gatineau area, on those chilly days to come. And, as always, you don't need to be an "expert" birder to join in; even counting birds at your feeder from the comfort of your own home, can be an important contribution. The more participants the better, to discover what's out there in our area during the Fall and Winter seasons!

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# Bird Highlights from the 50k 2007: the First Six Months

*Chris Lewis*

Despite dire predictions of “climate change!”, “global warming!”, and “the Ottawa Senators will never make it into the Stanley Cup final!” the first six months of 2007 didn’t seem to negatively impact either bird or human activity in the 50K. Bottom line: life goes on, get out there and enjoy the good stuff . . . and there was certainly lots of “good stuff” to enjoy.

## **Waterfowl**

Perhaps the most dramatic change has been the increase in the numbers of **Snow Geese** staging in eastern Ontario in both spring and fall. Six years ago in mid-April near Riceville, ON, a flock of approximately 12,000 was surprisingly large for our area. In spring of 2006, up to 40,000 were seen east of Ottawa, and in late December at least as many dropped in near Casselman and lingered until Christmas Day. This year, a huge influx built up to an estimated 100,000 birds near St-Isidore on 09 April 2007. Obviously this is a sign of not only a major population increase, but also an alteration in their migration route due to the attraction of agriculture in eastern Ontario. Additionally, the now annual sighting of **ROSS’S GEESE** during migration is also a good sign for this diminutive species whose range expansion and population increase has been quite remarkable. Up to **FOUR** Ross’s were with a group of 2000 Snow’s at the Alfred Sewage lagoons from 07-12 May—not only a high number, but a very late date. An excellent article on the first documented nest record for Ross’s Goose in Ontario appears in the April 2007 issue of the Ontario Field Ornithologists journal “Ontario Birds” Volume 25, Number 1.

A couple of **Greater White-fronted Geese** showed up as usual in our region; one was near Bourget on 24 March and another visited the Richmond area on the 26-27 March. Now that people have become aware of **Cackling Geese** (recently split from Canada Goose as a separate species) there has been a corresponding increase in reports. At least four individuals were noted with large flocks of Canada Geese in various locations, and a bird seen at a quarry pond on Moodie Drive in Bells Corners on 04 May was probably a first May record for Ottawa. Other noteworthy geese were **Brant** which flew through in good numbers in May, including a flock of approximately 1000 birds that were temporarily held up on the Ottawa River at Remic Rapids during strong NE winds on 16 May. A very late lingering adult spent

time in parklands on both the Ottawa (Remic Rapids lookout) and Rideau (Riverain Park) rivers until at least 22 June.

In the duck department, a few typical overwintering stragglers included the **Wood Duck**, **Green-winged Teal** and **Hooded Merganser**. This was probably the first time in several years that **Barrow's Goldeneye** was actually hard to find. One male played hide-and-seek all winter on the Ottawa River and he (or his evil twin) did the same on the Rideau; the last report was on 20 March. A gorgeous male **Red-breasted Merganser** graced the Moodie Drive quarry pond in late April, and a late male **Bufflehead** was still at the Richmond Conservation Area (former sewage lagoons) on 06 June. **Redhead** and **Ruddy Ducks** continue to do well, particularly at a few of our local ponds including the Alfred sewage lagoons and the Moodie Drive quarry pond. Another "species", the **Anaheim Duck**, was responsible for the migration of the Stanley Cup to California . . . oh, well, there's always next year for the Cup to migrate north again.

#### **Gallinaceous Birds, Pelicans, Cormorants, Herons, Bitterns & Ibises**

While **Gray Partridge** continue to hang on in low numbers in rural areas, **Wild Turkeys** continue to proliferate and occasionally show up in unexpected places, providing entertainment for suburban property owners. An **AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** flew past the mouth of the Gatineau River on the evening of 02 June, and was reported flying upriver past Innis Point Bird Observatory at Shirlcys Bay the next morning. A **Double-crested Cormorant**, unfortunately a probably ill or injured bird, was still struggling on the Ottawa River by the Deschênes Rapids on 21 January, but on a happier note at least six pairs nested for the second year on a small islet north of Lemieux Island. **Great Egrets** are now being seen annually in spring as well as later in the summer—so far this year, two were at Deschênes, QC on 27 April, one of these showed up across the river at Britannia on 07 May, and another spent a few days (25-28 May) at a storm water management pond along River Road. towards Manotick. Another treat was a pair of **Black-crowned Night-Herons** at a nest among the Ring-billed Gull colony at Deschênes; this species was discovered nesting at Lemieux Island farther east down the river in 2004. As the season progressed, more were seen including two adults and three juveniles at Mud Lake, Britannia in mid-June. Unfortunately a **YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** on the Rideau Canal below the National Arboretum did not linger for more than one cold windy afternoon on 09 April, but who could blame it? **American Bitterns** arrived back right on time, and **Least Bitterns** were reported again this year from mid-June onward in several locations such as the marsh north of the Nepean Equestrian Park at Moodie Drive and Corkstown Road, and the "Froggy Marsh" (Marais aux Grenouillettes) west of Masson, QC.



Three separate reports of **GLOSSY IBIS** in various locations in mid-May, indicated that there may have been more than one bird involved. A fly-over at Corkstown Road on 16 May was followed by a wary but quite cooperative breeding plumaged adult at the Casselman sewage lagoons on 20 May and then one at the Winchester lagoons on 23 May which was last reported heading south, hopefully to end up closer to where it belongs.

### **Hawks, Eagles & Falcons**

**Bald Eagles** are now almost a common sight in winter in Ottawa-Gatineau. The Gatineau hills continue to be the best place to observe them during the cold months, and fourteen individuals were noted along the Ottawa River on 14 January, coinciding with a sudden freeze-up. In the breeding season **Ospreys** continued to be similarly successful. A **Red-shouldered Hawk** was an *UN*common winter visitor—one spent the entire month of February hanging around bird feeders in Aylmer, QC. **Golden Eagles** are also doing well, and a few were reported from early January to mid-April in quite a variety of locations. Our downtown **Peregrine Falcon** pair nested again on the Crowne Plaza Hotel and hatched one young on the 16 May. The eleventh annual Falcon Watch began on 17 June and the youngster kept the dedicated volunteers quite busy during its first flights in latter half of June. By all accounts this year's offspring was a very precocious and successful flier. **Merlins** began to appear in a good variety of urban and suburban locations again this spring; this is also *their* eleventh year since the first modern nesting in Ottawa and they still seem to be going strong.

### **Rails, Gallinules & Cranes**

One of the most coveted species for local bird-listers is the secretive **YELLOW RAIL**. Visits to their traditional nesting grounds in the Richmond fen were unproductive in the past two years. However, on 21 May 2007, the unmistakable call was heard from the railroad tracks through the fen. Our more common **Virginia** and **Sora** rails as well as **Common Moorhens** and **American Coots** were well-represented. A high spring count of 15 **Sandhill Cranes** was reported from 07-15 April, feeding and performing courtship displays in the cornfields along Milton Road northeast of Carlsbad Springs. A total surprise was a **WHOOPING CRANE** that turned up in a field along Timm Road in Bells Corners on 16 May. This radio-tagged bird was reported to Operation Migration (OM) Whooping Crane reintroduction program in Wisconsin and was identified as #309, a four-year-old female who is evidently a bit of gypsy. Since her first flight down to Florida in 2003, she has never returned to Wisconsin except by retrieval and transport by OM. She has ventured a couple of times into the Point Pelee area via Michigan on her journey north, and in most years she has spent April and May in Lewis County, New York State. She was detected near Fenaghvale at the southern edge of the Alfred Bog two days before

making her day-trip to Ottawa, subsequently returned to New York and was still there as of 26 June. The OM web site [www.operationmigration.org](http://www.operationmigration.org) is an impressively comprehensive and fascinating source of information about this project.

### Shorebirds

The most exciting shorebirds of the season were found in a couple of the eastern lagoons outside of the 50K. A **WILLET** was seen from 25-26 May at the Alfred sewage lagoons, and a **MARBLED GODWIT** lingered at the St-Isidore lagoons from 20-25 May. A godwit of the same species (perhaps the same bird?) was also seen at Alfred on the 23 May. **Upland Sandpipers** were noted on territory near Winchester, Constance Bay and Carp in Ontario, and near Masson in Québec. Like the Gray Partridge, they seem to be holding on in low numbers. Otherwise, among the regular spring migrants, an **American Golden Plover** in breeding dress at St-Isidore on 25 May was a bonus, as was a female **Red-necked Phalarope** on 20 May associating with the **Wilson's Phalaropes** that breed at the Embrun sewage lagoons. Single Red-necked Phalaropes were also reported from Winchester and Alfred in subsequent days; again it is impossible to know if this was one bird making the rounds or multiple suspects.

### Larids

In early January, probably due to the mild weather until mid-month, seven species of gulls were seen in unprecedented numbers for this time of year. An early **Bonaparte's Gull** appeared at the Moodie Drive quarry pond on 15 April, but none were reported again until the end of May when they finally arrived in good numbers . . . along with one of our Ottawa "spring specialties"—**ARCTIC TERNS**. This incredible long-distance migrant has a history of following the Ottawa River on the way up to its far northern breeding grounds, and may be seen almost annually fishing on the river for a short time (for a couple of hours to a couple of days) during dynamic weather conditions in late May to early June. Two were seen this year on the morning of 20 May below the Deschênes Rapids. **Common Terns** also arrived back the same weekend, and the **Black Tern** colony at the "Froggy Marsh" had another great breeding season; others were also observed along the Rideau and Ottawa Rivers in June.

### Owls & Other Non-passerines

A number of interesting owl reports came in during this period. A pair of **Eastern Screech Owls** was seen early in the season near Island Park Drive, the same area where they nested in 2006. **Great Horned Owls** set up shop in the Britannia woods again; one was seen here frequently early in the year and two were heard calling to each other in the breeding season, however no actual nest was reported . . . perhaps the pair was able to find a more secluded nesting location than in the past three years when they became unwitting celebrities, complete with their own host of paparazzi. A

scattering of **Snowy Owls** was seen regularly mainly east of Ottawa until the end of March. A **Northern Hawk Owl** that appeared near Brennan's Hill, QC at the end of December lingered until at least 03 March, but a couple of unexpected **GREAT GRAY OWLS** reported from Fitzroy Harbour and March Valley Road on the 02 and 06 February were evidently just moving through as they were not seen again. **Short-eared Owls** were observed in various locations from early February to mid-April including the Shirleys Bay, Kanata, and Dunrobin areas on the Ontario side of the 50k, and along Chemin de la Rivière near Breckenridge in Québec. The Clyde Avenue woods were again productive for a **Long-eared Owl** in early April, and both **Barred** and **Northern Saw-whet Owls** were noted at the Jack Pine Trail as well as the Munster area and Gatineau Park.

A very uncommon **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** was reported on two separate occasions from the same location—the Carp Hills along the Thomas A. Dolan Parkway on 21 and 27 May. Its more common cousin the **Black-billed Cuckoo** was also found here as well in its other usual habitats. Pairs of **Red-headed Woodpeckers** nested again in the Pakenham area and Constance Bay areas. A female **Red-bellied Woodpecker** discovered at a feeder in Bells Corners late last year was still present into mid-January, and a male was on the Nortel campus at Carling Avenue and Moodie Drive on 12 March. The “northern” woodpeckers always generate a bit of excitement when they show up. At least one male and one female **American Three-toed Woodpecker** were present but frustratingly elusive along the Kerwin Road trail west of Kanata all winter into early March. Another Three-toed was found along the Sixth Concession in the Steel Line Road area south of Gatineau Park in late February, and **Black-backed Woodpeckers** were found in the park as well as the Kerwin trail and other areas until the end of March.

### Passerines

It's been many years since **Olive-sided Flycatchers** were reported from the fen at the north end of Ramsay Lake in Gatineau Park, but a good sign was a very vocal one discovered here on 10 June. Although not one of the busiest years for **Northern Shrike** reports, a few were around until mid-April. Of the five vireo species that breed in our area, the most uncommon are **Yellow-throated** and **Philadelphia**, with the former very scarce and not reported every year. In May of 2007, however, there were three separate reports—one from Gatineau Park west of the Champlain lookout on the 13 May, one on the 27 May in the Huntmar Road and Old Carp Road area, and another from the Larose Forest on 08 June. “Phillys” on the other hand, were as usual quite gettable in Gatineau Park with a bit of effort. **Common Ravens** continue to expand their horizons in Ottawa-Gatineau. One keen observer counted at least 15 active pairs at the beginning of their early breeding season in March, and many of these fledged multiple (up to five per nest) young in late April and early May. A

different sort of success story has occurred with **Carolina Wrens**. Although breeding is rarely reported in the 50K, it appears that more are coming here in the fall and staying for the winter! Five different homeowners reported Carolina Wrens at their feeders or gleaning insects in their sheds/garages in suburban areas all winter and into the early days of spring. A **Winter Wren** lived up to its name and wintered under a bridge along the Ottawa River in Deschênes, QC, and the **Sedge Wren** colony on Torbolton Ridge Road, west of Woodlawn, ON, appeared to be thriving again this year in this traditional location. A good movement of **Gray-cheeked** and **Swainson's Thrushes** was noted in mid-May during one of the few clearer windows of weather. A very early **Gray Catbird** dropped in to a feeder in Manotick on 21 March. **Northern Mockingbirds** are notorious for showing up in *any* season in Ottawa, and three were found from 24 April-06 May on both public and private properties.

Twenty-eight species of **warblers** is an excellent count for the 50K, and this year some real goodies were found. A male **BLUE-WINGED WARBLER** was banded at the Innis Point Bird Observatory at Shirleys Bay on 15 May, spent several days in the area, and was even recaptured once. A male **LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH's** persistence during the last two years along the Waterfall Trail below the McKenzie King Estate in Gatineau Park evidently netted him a mate—after reportedly breeding here last spring, a pair was seen here again this May. A very vocal and active male **PROTHONOTARY WARBLER** was discovered in the small wooded area at the corner of Island Park Drive and Clearview Avenue on 28 May and remained until at least the 30 May. Several **Cape May Warblers** were noted along Nine Mile Road in the Larose Forest in June, and the eastern or "yellow" race of **Palm Warbler** (rare in the east in spite of its name) arrived once again for the breeding season in the Mer Bleue bog.

All of our expected **sparrows** appeared in good numbers; the fields south of the international airport remain a consistently good area to find eight species on territory. A male **YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** has apparently decided that a bird feeder in the community of Forest Park near Embrun is THE place to spend his winter vacation. He was a regular here again for his third consecutive year until at least 20 April. The impressive showing of both **Red** and **White-winged Crossbills** early in the season gave an indication that they might linger and possibly breed here this year . . . sure enough, on 02 June seven Red Crossbills in Constance Bay, and a pair with a juvenile along the Eardley Masham Road the next day were reported by the same astute observer. Other finches were conspicuous by their absence. **Pine Grosbeaks** and **Common Redpolls** made no appearance at all this season, **Pine Siskins** were evident only in very small numbers in Gatineau Park, and **Evening Grosbeaks** were a virtual non-presence anywhere in the 50K. Global warming? . . .

no, just the erratic nature of finches. Like the Stanley Cup, there's always next season!

The birds/dates/locations mentioned in this article were derived from reports to the OFNC Bird Status Line, personal communications, as well as postings to the OFO listserve ONTBIRDS. To report bird sightings in the Ottawa area, please call the Bird Status Line at 613-860-9000. The OFNC web site [www.ofnc.ca](http://www.ofnc.ca) provides excellent information about birding in the Ottawa-Gatineau area as well as links to many other resources. Another highly recommended internet resource is the NEILYWORLD site by Larry Neily.

Thanks to all who contributed observations . . . and Good Birding!

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# Coming Events

arranged by the Excursions & Lectures Committee.

For further information,  
call the Club number (613-722-3050).

*Times stated for excursions are departure times. Please arrive earlier; leaders start promptly. If you need a ride, don't hesitate to ask the leader. Restricted trips will be open to non-members only after the indicated deadlines.*

**ALL OUTINGS:** *Please bring a lunch on full-day trips and dress according to the weather forecast and activity. Binoculars and/or spotting scopes are essential on all birding trips. Unless otherwise stated, transportation will be by car pool.*

**REGISTERED BUS TRIPS:** *Make your reservation for Club bus excursions by sending a cheque or money order (Payable to The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club) to Box 35069, Westgate P.O., Ottawa, Ontario, K1Z 1A2, at least ten days in advance. Include your name, address, telephone number and the name of the outing. Your cooperation is appreciated by the Committee so that we do not have to wait to the last moment to decide whether a trip should be cancelled due to low registration. In order for the Club to offer a bus trip, we need just over 33 people to register. If fewer than 30 register, we have the option of cancelling the trip or increasing the cost. Such decisions must be done a week in advance so we encourage anyone who is interested in any bus trip to register as early as possible. We also wish to discourage postponing the actual payment of bus fees until the day of the event.*

**EVENTS AT THE CANADIAN MUSEUM OF NATURE:** *The Club is grateful to the Museum for their cooperation, and thanks the Museum for the use of these excellent facilities. Monthly meetings are held in The Discovery Zone Theatre on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor.*

**BIRD STATUS LINE:** *Phone 613-860-9000 to learn of recent sightings or birding potential in the Ottawa area. To report recent sightings use the 613-860-9000 number and stay on the line. This service is run on behalf of the Birds Committee and is available to members and non-members.*



**Tuesday**  
**9 October**  
**7:00 p.m.**  
**Social**

**7:30 p.m.**  
**Speaker**

**OFNC MONTHLY MEETING**  
**SPHINXES TO SCIMITAR-BILLS - The Wild Life of**  
**East Africa**

**Speaker:** Roy John

**Location:** Canadian Museum of Nature (VMMB), Metcalfe and McLeod Streets, Discovery Zone Theatre, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor.  
Travel with Roy and Stephanie through the timeless land of Egypt, down the Nile from Alexandria to Aswan. Jumping troubled Ethiopia, continue through Kenya into Tanzania, following the herds of game. Join us as we tell you about lions that kill, elephants that charge, baboons that steal and rollers that dazzle.

**Saturday**  
**20 October**  
**3:00 p.m.**  
**to**  
**Sunday**  
**21 October**  
**3:00 p.m.**

**ANNUAL FALL OTTAWA-GATINEAU BIRD**  
**COUNT**

This event covers the entire Ottawa-Gatineau birding area. You do not have to be an expert birder to participate, nor do you have to attend the entire time. A post-compilation dinner is provided for all participants. Learn from the experts and join in the fun.

The coordinator for birding on the Ontario side is Eve Ticknor. Call her at 613-737-7551 or email at [sandbird@magma.ca](mailto:sandbird@magma.ca) to register.

To participate on the Québec side, contact the coordinator Daniel St-Hilaire at 819-776-0860 or email [savannarum@videotron.ca](mailto:savannarum@videotron.ca)

**Wednesday**  
**24 October**  
**7 a.m. to**  
**about**  
**11 a.m.**

**BIRDING IN STONY SWAMP**

**Leader:** John Cartwright (613-789-6714)

**Meet:** Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre, northeast corner of parking lot near Pizza Pizza.

We will check various trails for late fall migrants and possibly some early winter visitors.

**Wednesday**  
**7 November**  
**7:00 p.m.**  
to  
about  
**8:30 p.m.**

### **TELESCOPE WORKSHOP**

**Leader:** Paul Adler

**Meet:** Fletcher Wildlife Garden Interpretation Centre  
Paul, an experienced astronomer, will show members how to use the Tasco telescope that was recently given to our Club. We shall learn how to set it up, to focus on objects, and learn what its capabilities are. Weather permitting, we will take it outside to observe the heavens. If conditions are pretty good, Paul invites participants to come to his house (near the airport) to observe the heavens through his larger telescope. This workshop is open to the first 15 people who sign up at the Club number, 613-722-3050.

**Tuesday**  
**13 November**

**7:00 p.m.**  
**Social**

**7:30 p.m.**  
**Speaker**

### **OFNC MONTHLY MEETING**

#### **NAHANNI FOREVER - A CPAWS PRESENTATION**

**Speaker:** Jill Sturdy

**Location:** Canadian Museum of Nature (VMMB), Metcalfe and McLeod Streets, Discovery Zone Theatre, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor.  
Join Jill, National Outreach Coordinator of Canadian Parks And Wilderness Society, for a journey into Nahanni National Park Reserve and World Heritage Site in the Northwest Territories. Learn more about its majestic northern beauty and what is currently being done to further protect this boreal treasure.

**Tuesday**  
**11 December**

**7:00 p.m.**  
**Social**

**7:30 p.m.**  
**Speaker**

### **OFNC MONTHLY MEETING**

#### **CANOEERS' VIEW OF PUKASKWA NATIONAL PARK**

**Speakers:** Ann MacKenzie and Gord Belyea

**Location:** Canadian Museum of Nature (VMMB), Metcalfe and McLeod Streets, Discovery Zone Theatre, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor.  
Ontario's only wilderness park, Pukaskwa National Park covers 1880 square kilometres of rugged terrain and frigid water along the rocky north shore of Lake Superior halfway between Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay. Moist air, chilled by the largest fresh water lake in the world, moves inland off Lake Superior, where it has a significant effect on the habitat of the plants and animals surviving in the harsh environment of this Canadian Shield landscape. Ontario's largest national park was founded in 1978 and it protects a representative sample of the Central Boreal Uplands and the Great Lakes coastline.

Join Ann and Gord as they share their pictures and memories of paddling along this magnificent shore. View the startling contrasts between the giant cliffs and soft sandy beaches, the towering pines and the fragile wildflowers.

**Sunday**  
**16 December**

**OTTAWA-GATINEAU CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**  
Be part of this annual event that encompasses both sides of the Ottawa River. People of all skill levels are welcome, and it promises to be a lot of fun. Please contact Eve Ticknor at 613-737-7551 or email [sandbird@magma.ca](mailto:sandbird@magma.ca) for the Ontario side, and Daniel St-Hilaire at 819-776-0860 or email [savannarum@videotron.ca](mailto:savannarum@videotron.ca) for the Québec side.

**Saturday**  
**22 December**

**27<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL DUNROBIN-BRECKENRIDGE CBC**  
This is another great opportunity to participate in a Christmas Bird Count. Contact the coordinator and compiler, Bruce Di Labio, for details at (613) 839-4395 or email [bruce.dilabio@sympatico.ca](mailto:bruce.dilabio@sympatico.ca)

**Tuesday**  
**15 January**  
**7:00 p.m.**  
**Review of**  
**Minutes**  
**7:30 p.m.**  
**Meeting called to**  
**order**

**OFNC MONTHLY MEETING**  
**129<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING**  
**Location:** Canadian Museum of Nature (VMMB), Metcalfe and McLeod Streets, The Discovery Zone Theatre on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor.  
The Council for 2008 will be elected at this meeting. There will be a brief review of the activities in 2007 and a statement of the Club's finances will be given. This is an opportunity to meet most of the Club's executive and the chairs of the various committees and to find out what makes your Club tick. Refreshments will be served.

**DEADLINE:** *Material intended for the January - March issue must be in the editor's hands by November 2007. Mail your manuscripts to:*

**Karen McLachlan Hamilton,**  
**2980 Moodie Drive, Nepean, ON, K2J 4S7**  
**H: (613) 838-4943; email: [hamilton@storm.ca](mailto:hamilton@storm.ca)**

#### **ANY ARTICLES FOR TRAIL & LANDSCAPE?**

Have you been on an interesting field trip or made some unusual observations? Write up your thoughts and send them to Trail & Landscape. We accept email, diskettes and CDs, or submissions in traditional form- typed, written, or printed.

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[webmaster@ofnc.ca](mailto:webmaster@ofnc.ca)

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